

Scenes of Unimportance, Photos in a Frame by TolkienScholar

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Angst, Family

Language: English

Characters: Jonathan B., Joyce B.

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-07-01 23:11:03

Updated: 2019-07-01 23:11:03

Packaged: 2019-12-12 18:42:33

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,493

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Oneshot. Tag to Ep. 1x4. "Don't stare, it's rude." That's what they all say. But no one ever follows the rule.

Scenes of Unimportance, Photos in a Frame

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things*. No copyright infringement is intended. The title is a line from the song "Home by the Sea" by Genesis.

MC4A Fill Number: Ornate Oscillating Obelisks, Fill #1; Specious Narrative, Fill #1; Eternal Rhapsody, Fill #2; Starry Strums, Fill #4; Snicket Fence, Fill #5; Terms of Service, Fill #6; By Any Other Name, Fill #7; Fem Power Challenge, Fill #7

Individual Challenges: Short Jog (N); New Fandom Smell (Y); Cracked Façade (N); Rian-Russo Inversion (N); Tissue Warning (N); Interesting Times (N); Themes & Things B: Alienation (N); Themes & Things C: Photograph (N)

Representations: Jonathan Byers; Joyce Byers; Byers Family; Learning to Be Yourself; Photography; Bullying; Physical Abuse; Death of a Loved One; Taking Care of Family

Bonus Challenges: Creature Feature; Second Verse (A Long Dog; Odd Feathers; Machismo—Crying, Not Liking Sports; Mouth of Babies; Tomorrow's Shade; Spinning Plates; Unwanted Advice; Nontraditional; Not a Lamp; Persistence Still)

Tertiary Bonus Challenges: Oath, Spare

Summer Bingo Space Address: 3C – Explosion

Word Count: 1,234

Tag to Ep. 1x4: "The Body"

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"Don't stare, it's rude."

That's what they all say. The adults.

You're three years old, and there's a man standing on the sidewalk downtown holding a sign. You can't read what it says, but you wonder why his feet are bare and why he's got long hair like a woman. You look up to ask Mom, but she only pulls on your arm and

hurries you past, even though you wanted to go up and ask him what his sign says and if you can touch the colorful feathers woven through his hair.

"Don't stare," Mom tells you, "it's rude."

You're five years old, and Mom was wrong about kindergarten. It isn't fun; it's loud and messy and full of rules. And the other kids stare. They stare at your shoes because okay, yeah, maybe one of them does have a hole in it, but Mom says she can't afford to buy you any new ones, and they're not falling off your feet, so what's the big deal? They stare when you can't remember what sound D makes, even though you *could* remember if they would stop looking at you long enough to let you think. They stare when you go play by yourself at recess because it's the first time all day you've been able to get any peace and quiet, though it's not very peaceful when you can feel all of their eyes boring into you.

"Don't stare, it's rude," you say, in case none of their Moms ever told them about the rule.

You think maybe there should be a rule about pushing people down, too.

You're six years old, and apparently there's a part of the rule you've never heard before. At least, that's what Tommy H. says. He says you're allowed to stare at somebody if the person is a freak. But when you ask him what a freak is, all he'll say is that you're one, and when you ask if he's a freak, he pushes you down.

Supposedly there is a rule about pushing people, but kids don't seem to follow it very well. Sort of like how they don't follow the no staring rule, either.

You're nine years old, and by now you've figured out why you're a freak. You wear hand-me-down clothes that get worn out long before there's enough money to replace them, and Mom cuts your hair with sewing shears and a bowl so she doesn't have to pay the barber.

You'd rather watch and listen than talk, and instead of playing sports, you take pictures. You listen to music no one else listens to and watch movies no one else watches. It's the being different that makes you a freak.

You've also figured out something else. You kind of like being a freak. Even if you don't like being stared at.

You're twelve years old, and if the other kids don't follow the no staring rule, then you're not going to either. You have a really good camera now—a birthday present from Mom and Will that you still feel guilty about asking for—and you want to do more than take pictures of cardinals and corn fields. So now you stare at people through your camera lens, and sometimes, it's almost like they don't see whose face is behind it.

But you see them. You study their pictures, and you see how the kids who make others miserable are usually miserable themselves. You see how the kids who laugh when others get picked on are always watching the bullies, hoping it won't be their turn next. You see the regret and sympathy hiding in their eyes just before they turn away. You see who's nursing a secret crush, who didn't get enough sleep last night, who's trying to cover up bruises with long sleeves. You see how the masks slide off when people are alone, when no one's watching except the freak behind the camera.

Turns out, you're pretty good at staring.

You're thirteen years old, and it's not just kids who don't follow the no staring rule. In fact, the grown-ups' staring is almost worse, because they think they're being so subtle about it. They peer over their neighbors' fences and in through their dining room windows, hoping to see some juicy family drama, but if anyone catches them, they pretend they were just watering the flowers or dusting the windowsill. They stare at Mom's back as she passes them in the supermarket, and if you listen hard enough you can catch a few of the things they whisper: *"Fighting all the time. Heard he hits her and the boys. Should just file for divorce."*

You keep your head down and pretend you didn't hear.

You're sixteen years old, and you've just seen your brother's dead body lying in the morgue, and your Mom is having a nervous breakdown right before your eyes. You pull out of the morgue parking lot and follow her along the sidewalk at a crawl, begging her to just get in the car, but she keeps walking, insisting that you should go home. As if you could possibly leave her like this. You stop the car and jump out, chasing her over the crosswalk while a woman nearby tries very hard to look like she's not paying attention.

"Mom!" You grab her shoulder and turn her around to face you.
"Mom, stop."

"Just go home, Jonathan!"

"No! This is *not* an okay time for you to shut down."

"Shut down?" she says defensively. "What—"

"We have to deal with this, Mom; we have to deal with the funeral!"

"The funeral?" She's almost shrieking. "For what? For that *thing* in there?"

You take a breath, trying to keep it together. "Let me get this straight. Will... That's not his body because he's in the lights, right? And there's a monster in the wall? Do you even hear yourself?"

"I *know* it sounds crazy. I—I sound crazy! You think I don't know that? It is crazy!"

Two women walking past slow down, and you see one lean in to whisper something to the other. You can only imagine what they're saying.

"But I *heard* him, Jonathan; he talked to me! Will is calling to me, and he's out there, and he's alone, and he's scared, and..."

You shake your head, tears forming in your eyes as you realize you're not going to be able to get through to her.

"And I don't care if anyone believes me! I am not gonna stop looking for him until I find him and bring him home! I am going to *bring him home!*" Mom turns on her heel and walks away, charging down the sidewalk with her head down.

"Yeah?" you scream after her, tears streaming down your face. "Well, while you're talking to the lights, the rest of us are having a funeral for Will! I am *not* letting him stay in that freezer another day!"

Mom only shakes her head and keeps walking.

You look around at the silently fascinated crowd that has formed around you, glaring at them through your tears. They look down, their faces turning red, and begin to disperse. "Show's over!" you shout after them. No one looks at you as you run back to your car, slam the door, and tear off down the street.

After all, it's rude to stare.